

Handling of Information

Because events in the external world are impinging more and more upon Canada and Canadians, rapid and efficient communications have become essential to the Department's carrying-out of its complex role, not only in its operations at headquarters and between headquarters and Canadian posts throughout the world but also in the services it renders to other government departments and to the general public. During the year further progress was made towards the replacement of outdated communications equipment with the setting-up of a computerized store-and-forward message switch in Ottawa. Preliminary testing in operational mode was carried out with a view to attaining full operation early in the new year, and planning proceeded for the installation of a similar message switch at the main relay centre in London. Treasury Board approval was received for the acquisition of new cryptographic machines and the necessary teleprinter ancillaries, which will provide both greater security and more efficient communications. Following the amendment of the Canada Radio Act permitting reciprocity of treatment to foreign governments, a program has been initiated to provide radio-teletype communications with certain posts where commercial channels are either unduly expensive or unreliable.

During 1975, a special team produced a report on information-systems development, embodying broad-ranging recommendations to transform the nature of the records-management system to meet the requirements of the Department, which in many respects are unique. These recommendations were incorporated in proposals that received approval in principle from the Treasury Board, and the first steps towards implementation were taken. The main feature of the program will be the decentralization of the records service to provide the immediate and varied responses required by the operational divisions within the Department. This will be achieved by siting information-control and records centres with their respective bureaux, made possible by using a computer with on-line terminals for centralized indexing and registration of substantive material, and supported by the conversion of subject files to microfiche. A senior officer was designated as Director of Information Systems to collaborate with the Records Management Division in preparing the ground for the innovations that will transform, during the coming two or three years, both the

structure and mode of operation of this vital element of the Department's operations. The object of these developments, in association with those occurring in the communications field, is to contribute to the general improvement in departmental performance through the faster transmission, handling, storage and retrieving of the information that the Department works with. Of particular importance at this time of government-wide economy measures will be the prospect both of improving the quality of performance and gaining higher productivity while managing significant savings.

By joining the Council of Ontario Universities Cataloguing System (CATSS), the Library Services Division took a further step towards realizing benefits from computerized cataloguing carried out on a shared basis. Through access to various data-banks by new advanced techniques, the Library Services Division has achieved new levels of support in meeting the requirements of the Department. Short-run demands for information were also met through the clipping service, by which some 180,000 copies of items were provided. Automation has been applied extensively in controlling and developing the periodical-subscription services to over 100 posts abroad, and much other support was given to the development of useful post libraries.

Headquarters Environment

A memorial to the late Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson, in the form of a large mural in the main concourse of the building bearing his name, was unveiled at a ceremony on June 11. In attendance were Prime Minister Trudeau, Cabinet Ministers and many of Mr. Pearson's political and official colleagues.

The presence of the mural has contributed to the growing sense of permanence in the departmental occupancy of the building. The year 1975 marked a period of continuing adjustment to problems, as in any new home, but these are being gradually overcome, both by the Department as a whole and by individuals. The benefits of the concentration of all headquarters activities in one building are being increasingly realized through superior facilities for internal consultation and the improved organization and control of departmental administrative services.